



Hindsight wisdom

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To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it... to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. That was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word 'double-think' involved the use of doublethink. - George Orwell, 1984

In our democratic existence, the ultimate thought-control Orwell de-

picts doesn't mandate the outward trappings of tyranny. Indeed tyranny of ideas is possible without pervasive surveillance, physical brutality or an iron grip on power. Without all-seeing Big Brother, his ministry of truth and totalitarian indoctrination, our unofficial media cliques (whose very existence is most hotly denied by their own principal movers and shakers, and whose members are invariably of one inclination) engage in subtler forms of brainwashing.

Whatever they champion is gospel. Their postulates become infallible doctrine which they condition the masses not to subject to any test for objective validity. Downplaying, deriding and denigrating opposing convictions and denying them resonance, they portray their own viewpoints as the majority's article of

faith. They haughtily parade as democracy's spokespersons and contend that others can never be right.

They wield potential clout sufficient to make or break governments, redirect the course of history and indirectly shape the fates of those faithful followers of fashion who await their every cue.

The more cohesive and uniform the clique - and the more it places its manipulative muscle at the disposal of the political establishment - the more crucial its influence on current events and on its own members. The consensus among the latter is the product of the most indolent form of groupthink - adhered to without critical evaluation and without unorthodox analysis. In fact, hints of doubt and dissent are contemptuously rebuffed.

Hence, when someone as well regarded by the clique as *Haaretz's* Ari Shavit atones for its wrongdoings, his pangs of conscience are received as a welcome surprise - though he had beaten the media's breast on assorted previous occasions. Shavit lamented Binyamin Netanyahu's demonization, callous left-wing relish to uproot vilified settlers, and now the connivance of the press in installing the unworthy Ehud Olmert at the national helm.

Hindsight wisdom obviously, yet wisdom that is better articulated - even incompletely and after the fact - than not expressed at all. All the same, there's no guarantee that those like Shavit (and, to a lesser extent, belatedly Dan Margalit) who now,

in Orwell's words, "lay claim to morality" won't later somehow repudiate it via another dialectic convolution.

His honeyed sympathy for the settlers' tribulations notwithstanding, Shavit, for instance, never wavered in his support for the disengagement machination that led to their expulsion. For all his upstanding anti-corruption fervor, Shavit appeared as a supportive character witness for Omri Sharon, his father's partner-in-sleaze and co-hatcher of the resultant self-serving disengagement stratagem.

That said, Shavit is nevertheless absolutely right to write that Israel had no premier as abysmal as Olmert, that "in its entire history no undeserving leader ever endangered the State of Israel as much as Olmert endangers it." Shavit is likewise right to pin blame on the omnipotent clique of media lackeys. More specifically, he's right to home in on Margalit and Nahum Barnea (this year's Israel Prize laureate, whom Shavit accuses of having become "a poodle").

Whereas America's "liberal press scrutinized Richard Nixon under a magnifying glass," Shavit notes, "Olmert was never inspected." During what Shavit dubs "the Israeli press's months of darkness," the media "shielded him and repelled" any attempt to delve into Olmert's past.

Shavit only mentions Yoav Yitzhak in an obligatory aside. He fails to stress that this relentless crusader,

who tenaciously uncovered a series of highly suspicious and dubious dealings by Olmert, was ostracized by the clique, disparaged and disregarded until the state comptroller stepped in and Yitzhak's revelations could no longer be pooh-poohed.

It's not that the clique failed to investigate. As in Orwell's model, it knew the truth but sought to conceal it, just as it knew of Hizbullah's monstrous rocket arsenal, amassed following the very retreat the clique had promoted so assiduously. The clique became the indispensable accomplice to the conspiracy of silence, just as it now refuses to admit the utter disaster of its other pet project - disengagement.

Those outside the clique, who warned against the impending calamity in real time (as distinct from Shavit's retrospective perceptiveness), were marginalized. They're anyway relegated to fringe news outlets (unless

used as fig leaves to legitimize the clique's supercilious pose as the embodiment of sanity, moderation and pragmatism). In Orwell's 1984 parlance, nonconformists become "unpersons," studiously ignored, as if they never existed.

Shavit charges that clique trendsetters were "soft on Olmert," but he omits asking why. The clique's motivating force remains its visceral animosity for the resurgent Netanyahu - on par with the orchestrated loathing for Big Brother's 1984 arch antagonist, who was castigated regularly on the official "telescreen" daily "Two Minutes of Hate" feature, till his very image evoked hisses and reactions of "mingled fear and disgust."

In the true tradition of Orwell's doublethink, it's sometimes expedient to "forget whatever it is necessary to forget."